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SUBJECT: EP PRESIDENT POTTERING RE-ITERATES INVITATION TO
PRESIDENT-ELECT OBAMA FOR APRIL 1 OR 3

REF: 08 BRUSSELS 1704

¶1. (SBU) Hans-Gert Pottering, President of the European Parliament (EP), told Ambassador Silverberg on January 7 that the EP was very eager to welcome President-Elect Obama during his visit to Europe in April, and inquired about the status of his invitation to the President-elect, sent November 5 (reftel). Pottering reiterated many of the points made in his original invitation, noting that President Reagan addressed the EP in 1985 at a time when it was a much less important body. Pottering said that the EP of today, with 785 members who represent the nearly 500 million citizens of the EU, has decision power over a large portion of EU regulation, and is a more credible body than the one President Reagan addressed 24 years ago.

¶2. (SBU) Pottering claimed to have been in touch with British PM Gordon Brown's office, as well as with the Secretary-General's office at NATO. Based on his understanding of the early-April 2009 program from them, he offered more specifics about timing. Pottering suggested that the best time for the President-elect to address the EP in Brussels would be in the early to mid afternoon of April 1, prior to President Obama's arrival in London. (Pottering anticipates that the President-elect's schedule in London would commence sometime in the late afternoon.) As a second choice, Pottering said that Friday, April 3 would work well, with the EP being willing to extend their session past the normal Thursday afternoon close in order to accommodate the President-elect. The Ambassador told Pottering that the invitation was well known in Washington, and that she had noted it with transition planners in December.

¶3. (SBU) To conclude the discussion of the invitation, Pottering mentioned that the Russian Ambassador in Brussels has sought invitations for then-President Putin, and now President Medvedev, to address the current EP. Pottering, who is very pro-American, said that he has held off giving definitive answers to the Russians, so that the United States might speak first. He added that he couldn't avoid inviting the Russians forever, and whether or not the President-elect accepted the invitation, he would be under pressure from party leaders to allow Medvedev to speak before Europe-wide EP elections in June.

SILVERBERG

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